Introduction

Musical Modernism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century. Some readers may float a question mark at the end of the title. After all, modernism has supposedly been succeeded by the bluntly named postmodernism. Surely by the dawn of this new century all that is left of modernism are vestiges and memories. This study hopes to delete any such mental question marks. Modernism, as argued here, remains vital. It has not been supplanted. It draws upon a wealth of ideals and precedents and is fueled by continuing impulses. With such resources, it has crossed over into the twenty-first century.

In making such claims, this book joins a group of studies that have reassessed the position of both modernism and postmodernism in recent decades. Even some of the scholars who theorized the rise of the latter, notably Fredric Jameson and Charles Jencks, have had to acknowledge the obstinacy of modernism.[1] So resilient has it proven to be that Jencks has identified two streams in contemporary architecture: neo- and late modernism. The former "plays with" established forms, creating what amounts to "a new baroque elaboration of the language synthesized in the twenties."[2] The latter exaggerates and complicates elements of 1950s–60s high modernism. The result in both cases is architecture of stylistic extremes and little ethical relevance. The emptiness of the two gives Jencks confidence to proclaim, once again, that modernism has a "limited future," and to go as far as to predict its demise in fifty or sixty years.[3]

Where some see a slowly dying modernism, others perceive renewal. Marjorie Perloff has described how contemporary poets have rekindled the dynamics of classic early twentieth-century works to create a "twenty-first century modernism," the beginnings of "a 'new' poetics." If anything, postmodernism "seems to have lost momentum" at the turn of the new century, whereas the "modernist challenge" from the beginning of the last century "remains open."[4] Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf has made an equally bold

[1] See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) and *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002). Also Charles Jencks, *What is Postmodernism?* (New York and London: St. Martin's Press, 1986) and *The New Moderns: From Late to Neo-Modernism* (London: Academy Editions, 1990).

[2] Jencks, *The New Moderns*, 17.

[3] Jencks, *The New Moderns*, 10.

[4] Marjorie Perloff, *21st-century Modernism: The "New" Poetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 2, 164.

statement about concert music. According to him, a "second modernism" emerged around 1980. Claims of a postmodernist movement have proven to be shortsighted and rash. Whereas theories of postmodernism bandy about ideas like pluralism, heterogeneity, and the multifacetedness of the contemporary subject, second modernist works realize them through such means as complex polyphony, intricate rhythms, disconnected structures, microtonality, and conceptions of the work that have outgrown the opposition between open and closed. The leaders of this new period are three composers discussed here: Ligeti, Ferneyhough, and Lachenmann.[5]

In lieu of moribundity and rebirth, some scholars have described a modernism that simply carries on. It extends, sometimes brilliantly, sometimes laboriously, the impetuses of the early period while all the time changing in response to new inspirations and pressures. Alastair Williams argues that the 1970s produced a "transformed" modernism.[6] He considers postmodernism more as a critical revision of modernism than as a successor.[7] In particular, the semantic breadth of modernism expanded as it reached out to a host of styles and discourses even as it continued the characteristic self-contained explorations of material and structure.[8] Concluding an insightful account of different topics across a range of twentieth-century works, Arnold Whittall arrives at this century with both concerns over the vicissitudes confronting modernism and optimism about the future of the music. He holds up a group of recent pieces by Carter, Boulez, Berio, and Ligeti and reveals how they build upon previous developments and betoken a music that "could acquire new contexts, new perspectives."[9] Such pieces reveal modernism to be, as Whittall has said elsewhere, "an aesthetic more than capable of survival, and indeed further evolution, within the ultra-heterodox climate of the new century."[10]

This study seconds many of the points raised by the above authors, except for Jencks's death writ. As to the divide between modernism and postmodernism, there has been, as mentioned at the outset, no such split. This is

[5] Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, "Neue Musik am Beginn der Zweiten Moderne," *Merkur* 594/595 (1998), 873–75. The ideas in this essay have been explored further in a collection of essays: *Facets of the Second Modernity*, ed. Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Frank Cox, and Wolfram Schurig (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2008).

[6] Alastair Williams, "Ageing of the New: The Museum of Musical Modernism," in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (Cambridge University Press, 2004). 523, 535.

[7] Alastair Williams, *New Music and the Claims of Modernity* (Hants: Ashgate, 1997), 148.

[8] Williams, "Ageing of the New," 526.

[9] Arnold Whittall, *Exploring Twentieth-century Music: Tradition and Innovation* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 207.

[10] This quotation is taken from an interview in John Palmer, *Jonathan Harvey's "Bhakti" for Chamber Ensemble and Electronics: Serialism, Electronics and Spirituality* (Leviston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 153.

not to suggest that modernism is a dominant movement that encompasses the diversity of recent cultural production. No "ism," as to be discussed in the Conclusion, has the amplitude to do so, nor is it clear that modernism ever played such a magisterial role in the past. Modernism at this point in time is indeed one part of an "ultra-heterodox climate." Moreover, at this point in time, we are experiencing one particular period in the history of modernism. This study identifies the years from roughly 1980 to the present as such a period, which, to add to all the temporal qualifications attached to the ephemeral "modern," will be referred to as late modernism (yes, there will undoubtedly be later modernisms to come). The chronology loosely accords with the divisions proposed by Williams and Mahnkopf, the "transformed modernism" of the former and the "second modernism" of the latter. Such shifts obviously cannot be pinpointed but what can be observed is that modernist idioms during this time changed in ways that departed from the ideals of the decades following World War Two, departures striking enough to inaugurate a new period of modernist music.

Before discussing those changes, a general conception of modernism needs to be established. Modernism is used here in the widely accepted notion of the term, that of the significant departures in musical language that occurred around the turn of the twentieth century.[11] The departures created new understandings of the harmonic, melodic, sonic, and rhythmic realms of composition. Needless to say, the nature of the departures, their significance, and their scope have been the stuff of critical scrutiny and debate. Some recent scholarship has aimed to expand the idea of modernism beyond the focus on compositional innovation by staking out modernist ideals in popular culture or in more traditional composers.[12] This study holds to the more established notion of modernism, a notion truer to the types of works discussed here. Yet, like those other approaches, it creates new perspectives by viewing early modernism from afar, not from the realms of popular culture or traditional idioms but rather from a later period, that from the 1980s to the present. In particular, the ideals and behavior of late modernist styles can be spotted in earlier styles. Projecting those qualities upon the initial styles offers alternative ways to appreciate the latter.

Most changed is our understanding of how modernism acts, particularly the action most associated with it, that of innovation. The idea of

[11] There have been attempts to situate the origins of modernism further back in the nineteenth century. J. Peter Burkholder sees modernism as extending the historicist tendency in nineteenth-century music. Burkholder, "Museum Pieces: The Historicist Mainstream in Music of the Last Hundred Years," *Journal of Musicology* 2 (1983), 115–34.

[12] Two studies pursuing these directions include Alfred Appel, Jr., *Jazz Modernism From Ellington and Armstrong to Matisse and Joyce* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002) and J. P. E. Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

modernism acting, let alone the action of innovation, requires explanation. In many evocations of the concept, modernism – called the new, modern art, a new spirit, or some other characteristic name – assumes the position of a subject that does something, like, as Ezra Pound memorably remarked, "make it new." Innovation, the breaking away from the conventional, is one role typically assigned to modernism. In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno whips up a frenetic energy called "the new." As he describes it, the new "seeks," "explodes," "negates," and commits "violence," all things done to the secure and staid.[13] Adorno also presents modernism as tracking "advanced material," the most challenging conceptions of form and expression at a given time.[14]

Modernism has acted out the role of innovation on many of the historiographical stages set for it. This assigned part, though, is rather limited, as the advances made have been confined to areas of compositional technique, a focus that neglects the jarring effects modernist idioms have had on the larger cultural arena and modes of expression. Carl Dahlhaus traces this narrow focus back to the decades after World War Two. At that time, composers and critics, emulating the scientific ethos of the Cold War period, emphasized "compositional-technical discoveries and hypotheses" in surveying both the present and immediate past. They unfolded a "problem history," in which a work responds to and solves the compositional problems raised by previous pieces. Each solution yields not only new approaches but also fresh problems to be tackled by future works.[15] By perpetuating the new, the solutions consign previous works, some still rather new, to the pile of past and no longer relevant results. Most textbooks of twentieth-century music reinforce the bias toward innovation.[16] The result is a chronological log of compositional advances.

Innovation is, however, a hard act to keep up, for both modernist works and the historical narratives built around them. The strain is particularly great for the latter, which are so invested in the idea of compositional progress. The narratives typically flag when they hit the 1960s and 1970s, if not earlier. At this point, newness, especially the wholesale kind achieved at the beginning of the century, is hard to be had, as it seems that everything

[13] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. and ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 19–24.

[14] Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. and ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 31–34. Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 85–89.

[15] Carl Dahlhaus, "Progress and the Avant Garde," in his *Schoenberg and the New Music: Essays*, trans. Derrick Puffett and Alfred Clayton (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 20.

[16] As Christopher A. Williams has remarked, these "ingrained patterns of thinking" have been "replicated" in "book after book." Williams, "Of Canons and Context: Towards a Historiography of Twentieth-century Music," *repercussions* 2 (1993), 37.

has already been done. For Adorno, the quandary was not a sign of defeat but rather a defining characteristic of the new. Instead of the intrepid composer, he personifies the quest for the new in the figure of a child at the piano trying to find a chord that he or she has not hit before. Of course, there are only so many possible chords, but it is the determination not the results that is important.[17] As Adorno concludes, "the new is the longing for the new, not the new itself."[18] "The cult of the new," he adds, "is a rebellion against the fact that there is no longer anything new," a fact reinforced by the mass-produced sameness issued by factories.[19] Even the seemingly endless development of "advanced material" reaches an end. In a 1954 talk on the "aging" of new music, he mentioned how the "expansion of musical materials" had come to a remote, "extreme point" and that the possibilities of sound within the equal-temperament system had been exhausted.[20] A few years later, writing on Berg, he stated that the "pure evolution of the materials of music had reached a certain threshold."[21]

At this point, textbook histories typically shift narratives from tales of innovation to repeated notices about pluralism.[22] Instead of looking at the singular advances of the individual work, we now consider the place of the lone work, radical or conservative, within an all-encompassing stylistic diversity. Everything belongs to the stylistic mass, which is presented as a feature of contemporary musical life and one that will continue to be a feature for the foreseeable future. Unlike Adorno's material, the mass never

[17] Perhaps it was only a matter of time before the intrepid composer and curious child met. In his *Chord Catalogue* (1986), Tom Johnson states every chord that can be formulated within the span of an octave. That makes for 8,178. The work is for any keyboard instrument. A few years later he wrote *Music for 88* (1988), a piece that involves all the keys of the piano.

[18] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 32.

[19] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: NLB, 1974), 235. For a discussion of Adorno's concepts of the "new" and modernity, see Daniel Chua, "Drifting: The Dialectics of Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music*," in *Apparitions: New Perspectives on Adorno and Twentieth-century Music*, ed. Berthold Hoeckner (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1–17.

[20] Theodor Adorno, "The Aging of the New Music," in his *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 190. Here I depart from the translation by Robert Hullot-Kentor and Fredric Will published in the Leppert collection. The original German (Zugleich jedoch ist die Expansion des musikalischen Materials selbst bis zu einem Äußersten vorgestossen) states that the expansion has reached an extreme point. According to the translation by Hullot-Kentor and Fredric Will, the expansion "has gone ahead limitlessly," a phrase that implies endless expansion and not the possibility of the remote terminus suggested by an extreme. For the original German, see "Das Altern der neuen Musik," in Adorno's *Dissonanzen: Musik in der verwalteten Welt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 147.

[21] Adorno, "Berg's Discoveries in Compositional Technique," in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London and New York: Verso, 1992), 192. The limits reached by Adorno's ideas of advanced material are discussed in Günter Seubold, "Some Reflections on Th. W. Adorno's Music Aesthetics," *Canadian Aesthetics Journal/Revue canadienne d'esthétique* 6 (Fall 2001) (www.uqtr.ca/AE/Vol_6/articles/seubol.html).

[22] See Robert Morgan, *Twentieth-century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 407–22, 484–86.

moves, either forwards or backwards. The individual work remains part of a static diversity. Things, though, are not so static. Within the mass, there are all sorts of relationships between pieces, from confrontation to collaboration. As called for here, we must reckon with this diversity rather than repeat cant about an unprecedented pluralism. One way of doing so is to reveal the antinomies and convergences within the mass.

This study will build a historical narrative around the mode of inquiry, another characteristic way in which modernism "acts." Inquiry is used here in the general sense of the term, an investigation into points of interest. In this case, the investigation is made through and sustained by musical works. The points of interest explored by the pieces include aesthetic ideals, compositional material, and facets of expression. Throughout the history of modernism, works have taken up such points. Aware of these repeated explorations, we can perceive long-standing lines of inquiry. For example, pieces by Debussy, Webern, Boulez, and Kurtág have scrutinized the properties of the fragment. There may or may not be specific ties between their works, but the compositions do share an interest in fragmentary states. That interest is enough to bring them together. Linked with one another, the pieces can be seen as forming a single line of inquiry, one that has stretched across the twentieth century.

With this in mind, we can begin to perceive the differences between historical accounts premised upon innovation and an account based on lines of inquiry. To make the point, two late twentieth-century idioms will be discussed: spectralism and the new complexity. The two are often viewed as being among the "newer" developments during the 1970s and 1980s, as attested to by the name coined for the latter. The following discussion provides a different way of viewing them than that of sheer innovation, a way that accords more with the dynamics of late modernism. To be blunt, neither idiom was so new after all. They had precedents, or, as Fredric Jameson has put it, they had a "place" established for them. Writing on obdurate modernist styles that endure in the face of postmodernism, he shows how more recent styles (which in his example only go as far as Nabokov and Beckett) have settled into the place made for them by earlier styles. The "codification" of earlier innovations has provided them with a "theoretical certainty" and "models" upon which to draw.[23] Spectralism may have changed conceptions of the nature and construction of the sonic object, but it was still working within a specific model, that of the independent and volatile realm of sound opened up by Varèse, Cage, Ligeti, and others. The complexity at the heart of the new complexity had already been attained in works by integral serialist composers and Xenakis (for

[23] Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 197–200.

example, *Eonta*). The composers in the movement ratcheted up both the level of intricacy found in such pieces and the virtuosic strain placed on performers.

In lieu of innovation, both spectralism and the new complexity can be heard as partaking in a mode of inquiry. Studies of modernism have failed to isolate this modus operandi, let alone explain it in any detail. To observe it at work, we need once again to recast the notion of innovation central to modernism. The compositional departures of early modernism can be considered as possibilities. With these developments, composers immeasurably broadened the musical world, opening up whole new tonal, rhythmic, and sonic frontiers. A history of modernism could be written around the explorations of those possibilities, a search of the frontiers. So vast has the new musical world proven that the explorations have continued on through the twentieth century and into the next. The investigations have resulted in a range of new styles, sounds, and organizational approaches. To return to the above two examples, spectralism and the new complexity have furthered inquiries that have long been under way. The former, along with works of Varèse, Cage, and Ligeti, grows out of the isolation and cultivation of sound that began with the unprecedented emphasis placed on timbre in the works of Debussy and the Second Viennese School. The latter probes the limits of compositional density, asking what happens when there is "too much."[24] The multilayered works of Ives and early Stravinsky were among the first to accumulate such a surplus of detail.

Inquiry gets at the restless curiosity driving modernism. Rather than fixating on the new, the rare quantity of that which is "not already used-up," modernist idioms return to specific ideas and materials and never manage to use them up.[25] Modernism has a strong awareness of its own precedents and builds upon them. Constantly reworking established elements, modernist idioms strengthen connections with past explorations, thereby creating the surprising result of modernism solidifying the past, its own past. At the same time, the involvement with previous explorations can yield the new, not so much the shocking gesture as the different ways in which an idea has been treated. The mode of modernist inquiry is not unlike that in science, one in which an experiment cites and departs from previous research in the hope of reaching new insights.[26]

[24] Brian Ferneyhough, *Collected Writings*, ed. James Boros and Richard Toop (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1995), 117.
[25] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 26.
[26] The mode of inquiry is different from the self-amputating scientific models that influenced accounts of compositional method in post–World War Two repertoires mentioned above. In his discussion of the emphasis on "discovery" in that literature, Dahlhaus makes a similar point: "Modern physics includes classical physics; yet it would be a gross overstatement to say the same about modern compositional technique." Dahlhaus, "Progress and the Avant Garde," 20.

The prolongation of lines of inquiry may suggest that the history of modernism has been one of smooth continuity. This is obviously not the case. It is a history marked by both continuity and disruption. This study chronicles a particular break, that occurring around 1980. The break, as will be discussed, was made largely along the lines of construction and expression. Late modernist works departed from previous approaches to those two areas, but they also extended other approaches. To capture these contrary tendencies, this study adopts a dual historical focus, one split between discontinuity and continuity. A model of inquiry demands such a focus, as individual lines typically cite and take further explorations begun in earlier pieces while changing directions. Such is the case with the two inquiries described here: those into compositional states and the act of expression.

Compositional states have played a prominent role in musical modernism. Surprisingly, this role has received little attention, let alone been identified as an ongoing point of exploration. A compositional state involves the shaping of the musical language in a work so as to emulate a specific ideal. The ideals can be sonic in nature, such as silence and the mutability of sound, or conceptual, such as purity, complexity, and the fragmentary. An ideal governs a piece. It provides sounds, behaviors, and structural patterns to which the musical language adheres. The sounds are approximated, the behaviors are followed, and the patterns are erected. Through this diligence, the music aims to become the ideal, or, more accurately, it aims to become a manifestation of the ideal – flecks in the fragmentary, a facet of the pure, or a spell of silence.

Works involved with compositional states do not merely mimic a specific condition; rather, they engage an ideal so as to delve into its unique associations and properties. A musical exploration of silence, for instance, can lead to suggestions of absence, death, and mystery. Purity holds out ascetic notions of wholeness and integrity. The scrutiny of these ideals also offers intriguing musical inquiries that go beyond those required to evoke a state. Entering the fragmentary, composers can challenge notions of unity and form; drawing upon the flux of sound, they can probe thresholds of transformation. As these examples make clear, there is no such thing as a single inquiry into a compositional state. The exploration of a compositional state fans out into many directions: how the material can be molded to fit an ideal, the associations of the ideal, and the formal and sonic explorations spurred on by a state. This study concentrates on four states, each of which sustains multi-level inquiries. The four are purity, silence, the fragmentary, and the flux of sound.

The idea of compositional elements inhering in larger musical or aesthetic entities calls to mind Adorno's concept of "musical material," which includes the advanced type pursued by modernism. A comparison of material and states reveals differences and similarities between the two and puts into sharper relief defining characteristics of the latter. As Dahlhaus has argued, the notion of advanced material epitomizes Adorno's idea of the historical properties of tones.[27] Musical material stores precedents and conventions and, driven by a tendency to change, it pushes toward new possibilities. Consistent with the expansive critical forum in which Adorno places works, the historical is just one aspect of musical material, which also possesses compositional/technical, aesthetic, philosophical, and sociological dimensions. The broad scope makes clear that Adorno's material is far from the natural resource that past theorists considered pitches and harmonies to be. It is not raw clay that composers can mold as they like. On the contrary, they must submit to its exigencies. Most unwieldy of all is advanced material. The rarefied compound holds the most demanding technical and expressive means of a particular historical moment. It is highly independent, driven by its own tendencies and beholden to no work or outside ideal. Pieces tap into the elite stuff, capturing bits, not all, of its newness.[28]

Compositional states may seem to involve the kind of sculpted material dismissed by Adorno. As outlined earlier, the "material" of a state is handled in ways to evoke an ideal, but it is not just the notes that are being shaped, so too is the ideal. Ideals, like the fragmentary or purity, are just that – ideals. They exist as abstractions. To become the stuff of art, they have to be realized in material terms. Works engaged with states perform this transubstantiation. In doing so, each arrives at one of the many different guises that the ideals can assume. For example, the fragmentary, fitting for an ideal about strewn pieces, can take myriad individual shapes. Compositions create their own version of the state by concentrating on the crucial relationship between part and whole. Some works set the fragments in oblique orbits around a whole, whereas others attempt to annul the possibility of coherence. If states are to be considered as sculpting, then the sculpting creates a far more interesting compositional scenario than any kind of utilitarian molding. In this case, the sculpting of the material, how the pitches and sounds are used, is just as important as the appearance of the final sculpture, the evocation of the ideal.

[27] The following observations about advanced material draw upon Dahlhaus's discussion of the concept. Dahlhaus, "Adornos Begriff des musikalischen Materials," in *Schönberg und andere* (Mainz: Schott, 1978), 336–39. See also Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 31–34.

[28] Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, 88–89, 149.

Adorno's advanced material and compositional states occupy separate historical dimensions. Aloof and willful, the former flows within a self-contained historical stream, apart from the pieces that dip into it. Compositional states are not so removed. They commit to large aesthetic ideals that exist outside of both the material and the piece. If anything, it is the ideals that form a historical stream, which is sustained by the ongoing inquiry into states. Adorno's own theoretical discussions of the fragment in musical works, for example, added to the inquiry into the state of the fragmentary. The continuity of the ideals brings up another difference from Adorno's model. As he admitted, advanced material had run its course, succumbing to the depletion of the new. No such terminus has arisen for the ideals taken up in states, which have figured prominently throughout the history of modernism. The interest in them has not dimmed, as seen in the works considered here. As long as the ideals remain vibrant, so too will the inquiry into states.

A broader understanding of states can be gained by changing emphasis from material to compositional focus. Whereas the former concept details the types of sounds selected by a composer and the shapes they take in a work, the latter emphasizes how the ideals of a state influence aspects of compositional method and structure. The dynamics and patterns intrinsic to an ideal serve to construct a logic for the composer to follow. Consistency with those properties can assure consistency within a piece. For example, purity, as to be expected, enforces a severe compositional logic. Only sounds recognized as pure are to be chosen and they must be handled in certain ways, typically through means of refinement or reduction. Through such steps, purity serves as both an inspiration and a means by which the composer can conceive of and organize a piece. The ideals in a state also play a role in terms of reception. In regard to purity, listeners can comprehend the piece in relation to conceptions of the pure. The sparse materials can be heard as manifestations of the restrictions dictated by the ideal, and the winnowing down of sounds can be perceived as the workings of the process of reduction used to attain an essence.

The role of states as a point of compositional focus is pertinent to modernist music since 1980. To understand how and why, we need to adopt the dual historical perspective described above. Given that the inquiry into states has been active since the early years of modernism, it is safe to assume that the ideals in states have long served in such a role. Chapters 1 and 2 make that point by examining the cultivation of purity in Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge* and silence in Webern's Five Pieces for Orchestra (op. 10).[29]

[29] Chapter 4 discusses a non-musical example, looking at how Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* extends the modernist interest in the genre of the lament.